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“Incense” Sends Iowa Teens to Emergency Rooms

DES MOINES – Citing an increasing number of young Iowans requiring emergency hospital treatment, particularly in recent weeks, officials at a news conference today called on parents to talk with teenagers about the potential danger of using a rapidly growing assortment of synthetic drugs sold in small and colorful packages.

“New products that may be just as harmful as K2 and other synthetic compounds recently outlawed in Iowa are making teenagers sick and sending them to hospital emergency rooms,” said Dale Woolery, Acting Director of the Governor’s Office of Drug Control Policy. “Our office will ask the Legislature to expand Iowa’s law to ban additional synthetic drugs of danger as we identify them, but the urgent need now is for education to keep people safe.”

Officials issued the public safety alert from an emergency room at Des Moines’ Mercy Medical Center, where some teenagers have been treated for the effects of their synthetic drug use by center director Dr. Tom McAuliff and his colleagues. Joining McAuliff and Woolery for the announcement were the parents of two Iowa teens stricken by synthetic drugs, and other health and law enforcement officials.

“As some have suggested, smoking any of these newer synthetic drugs labeled as ‘incense’ or ‘potpourri’ is like playing Russian roulette,” said Woolery. “I urge parents to talk with their teenagers about these products immediately, because while we may not always know what’s in them, it’s not worth risking a life to find out.”

A national study released yesterday said one in nine high school seniors report using synthetic cannabinoids, the most prevalent of the designer drugs, during the last 12 months. Congress is working on a more expansive federal law to outlaw a larger number of synthetic compounds.

Iowa’s law listing eight synthetic drug compounds as Schedule I Controlled Substances took full effect in September. Since then, a small but steadily growing number of teenagers have been admitted to emergency rooms suffering from anxiety attacks, paranoia, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeats, elevated blood pressure, vomiting, suicidal thoughts and other related injuries.

“Thankfully, most Iowa businesses choose not to sell these new synthetic substances, and I ask the few who are marketing them to voluntarily halt such sales,” said Woolery. “The last thing we need is a new generation of drugs threatening the health and safety of our next generation.”

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